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U.S. Army Units to Build 6th Airfield in Honduras

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TEGUCIGALPA, Honduras, March 2 — In a continuing expansion of military centers in Honduras, United States Army units will begin on Monday to build an airfield, according to an American Army spokesman. It will be the sixth airfield to be built by such units here in the last three years.

The new airfield is one of several indications that the Reagan Administration may be planning a more extensive and lengthy American military presence in Honduras than Administration officials have yet to acknowledge.

The airstrip, which will handle C-130 army transport planes, is being built near the village of Mocoron, about 20 miles from the northeastern Honduran border with Nicaragua. The area is the main base for Miskito Indian guerrillas who regularly attack Nicaraguan Army units across the border.

Construction of the new landing strip is only the first step in a series of new, large-scale United States military maneuvers in Honduras that at their peak will involve 4,400 American troops, according to American officials here. The maneuvers are the latest in a series of American military exercises in Honduras over the last three years.

Exercise Near Nicaragua border

The exercise that begins Monday, named Cabanas 86, is scheduled to end in May with an airborne assault by Special Forces units that are to maneuver within seven miles of Nicaragua, according to Maj. Carl A. Gidlund, an Army spokesman.

In a separate maneuver that also begins this month, named Ahuas Tara 86, 2,000 American troops will carry out a "command and control" exercise that appears to be a trial-run in managing a full-scale air and land attack by American forces.

Although the official American position is that the maneuvers offer no more than a convenient opportunity to train troops, United States officials say the exercises are designed to intimidate the Nicaraguan Government as well as to prepare for possible future military action against the Sandinista Army.

The almost continuous exercises by United States military units, as well as the multimillion-dollar construction of military installations, have already led some Congressmen to question the Administration about its plans for Honduras, a country that also provides bases for the main Nicaraguan anti-Government guerrilla army.

Pentagon officials contend that the construction of military installations here, including storage areas, roads, radar stations and airfields, is simply a

by-product of temporary training exercises and therefore does not require special Congressional authorization.

But according to Congressional aides who monitor the issue, investigators for the General Accounting Office have recently concluded in an unpublished study that many of the installations built by American military units in Honduras are permanent and semipermanent in nature and therefore should have been approved by Congress before being built.

There are indications that plans are being laid for a long-term American military presence in Honduras. Last year a Pentagon memo was made public that listed construction plans that assumed the main American-occupied military base at Palmerola would be in use for at least three to five more

years.

Pentagon officials said at the time that the memo only listed possible "contingency plans." But the Administration has recently asked for funds to upgrade the base, listing projects that bear a marked resemblance to those outlined in the so-called "contingency" memo.

Of the five other airfields that American units have built from scratch in Honduras, one has been handed over to the Central Intelligence Agency to supply Nicaraguan anti-Government guerrillas. Another in the southern town of San Lorenzo is used to launch daily reconnaissance flights that are carried out by unmanned drones with remote-controlled television cameras over northeastern El Salvador to check on guerrilla activity.